

Behind the Bolted Door?

By ARTHUR E. McFARLANE

Illustration by Henry Raleigh

SO it was Maddalina whose sharp finger-nails had left those deep red scratches on Mrs. Fisher's arms; it was her shrill voice that had been heard crying "No, no, no!" and "Si, si, si!" on the afternoon of the murder. It was she who had opened the envelop and stolen the bank-notes which Mrs. Fisher had left for Willings.

But—there the trail became blank again.

Was it her hand also that struck the blow at Mrs. Fisher's temple? And, if it were, whose hand had given those ghostly rappings a full hour after the murder? Whose voice had cried, "My God, my God!" in that locked apartment, long after Maddalina had fled?

The shock of Maddalina's attack on D. Hope had left the little group exhausted. The Doctor stood, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. D. Hope had sunk into a chair, and Willings was fanning her. Only the Judge could summon energy enough to ask one of the questions that were throbbing in all their minds.

"Can you make her tell anything else, Laney?" he queried. "Can't you make her tell who the mur—"

But, before the Doctor could answer, their attention was forced back again to the chair where Maddalina, panting and apparently exhausted, was showing signs of waking from her trance. A long-drawn, pitiful moan broke from her lips.

"Ah-h! *Madre di Dio!*" It was as if, in her first waking moment, she realized that she had been made to betray herself. She dashed herself at her captors like a caged beast. It required all the strength of the three men to force her back into the chair.

Then, spent and flagging, she began to pour forth a ceaseless stream of denials.

She knew nothing of Mrs. Fisher's death. She had not heard of it till next morning, when she read it in *Il Telegrafo*. She knew nothing of her jewels, her pearls, of any stolen money.

Again the Doctor showed her the big blue envelop that had contained the bank-notes. For an instant she gaped, blenching. But next moment came more denials.

From the street below came the sound of horses' hoofs and a gong. Judge Bishop went to the window and looked out.

"It's Boyce," he said to the Doctor quietly. "He's got his patrol; he's come for her. Can you make her tell anything else?"

"I'm afraid not, but there's just a chance. We'll let her know that we've got Jimmy, anyway. Perhaps that may loosen her tongue. Send for him."

A moment later the little Cockney appeared in the doorway; but, before he could speak a word, even before he could enter, the girl broke forth, shrieking her recognition: "*A-i-i!*"

THEY had believed her physically spent. But now, at the sight of Jimmy, a beast fury leaped up in her that passed anything she had shown before.

"Liar! English dog! Spy!" she cried out. And the next moment, while she tore at her handcuffs, she had begun to scream such things as Laneham himself had never looked for.

Let them ask their questions of Jimmy too, she shrieked. Let them ask him, first about that *scritto*—that writing—which the Signora Fisher had had them sign, and that only a few hours before her death! If it was thieves who killed her—jewel thieves from Italy—let any one say what that writing meant!

Let him tell, she shrieked, about the quarrel they had heard! Oh, *si, si, si!* He had heard it as well as she! Let him tell about that, and say if it had anything to do with the killing of the Signora!

She hardly paused to catch her breath.

HOW was Mrs. Fisher murdered, and who was the murderer? Judge Bishop, Mrs. Fisher's lawyer, and Dr. Laneham, her physician, going to her apartment, are admitted by Jimmy, the Cockney butler, who immediately afterward packs his grip and mysteriously flees, leaving them alone. They call to Mrs. Fisher, and, receiving no answer, seek to enter her private suite. They reach the first door; and instantly, as their fingers touch it, the lock is turned on the inside; they try a second door with the same result; and a third. Who is inside? Whose hand turns those locks at the minute the two men seek to enter? They hear footsteps inside, accompanied by an uncanny knocking on the woodwork. And a voice in agony cries out: "My God, my God!" They burst in the door. Lying on a couch, by her private swimming-pool, is the body of Mrs. Fisher. Every window in the apartment is locked; every door bolted. Mrs. Fisher is known to have pearls of great value in a safe protected by the Electric Protection Company. Is it for these she has been murdered? If so, how did the murderer gain entrance? How has the deed been done, and how has he made his escape?

The Doctor undertakes to solve the mystery. His first clue is the discovery of Jimmy, the Cockney butler, the last man to see Mrs. Fisher alive. While Jimmy is telling his story, the Doctor's telephone rings. The call is from the Electric Protection people. Some one or something has secured entrance to the apartment, in spite of the guards, and has made an attempt on the life of one of the E. P. watchmen. Has the murderer returned to the scene of his crime? Maddalina, Mrs. Fisher's maid, has been missing since the murder. They track her to a notorious Italian tenement, capture her, and bring her to the Doctor's house. The Doctor tries an experiment in hypnotism; and in her trance Maddalina gives terrible evidence against herself. The Doctor and his friends are no longer able to doubt that the dreadful quarrel overheard by a neighbor on the afternoon of the murder was a quarrel between Mrs. Fisher and Maddalina, and that the deep scratches on the murdered woman's arms and neck were made by Maddalina's fingers.

Like a torrent her accusations rushed forth, one upon another.

And let them ask him about the voice he had heard so often! Let him tell of that! Many times he had heard it, and so had she! In that voice was the devil's work! The corners of her mouth were slavered. She seemed about to have another seizure.

"Let him tell of that—of that—of that!"

Clearly, nothing was to be gained by holding her longer: she was beside herself. At a nod from the Doctor, three patrolmen, who had come with Boyce, the Commissioner, stepped forward, and bore her, still screaming her accusations and denials, downstairs and into the wagon. Judge Bishop went with them.

And again the Doctor, Willings, and D. Hope were left facing the little butler alone.

His face bore telltale evidence that

Maddalina's thrusts had struck home. The fatal look was there—the look that comes into the faces of those who are holding back some important bit of information. Dr. Laneham had described it to them at the very beginning as the "Zan-cray look." It was on Jimmy's face at this moment, unmistakably.

"Well," said the Doctor.

"How about it, Jimmy?"

You gave us to understand that you were telling us everything, you know. And if you're not?"

The little Englishman still stood unspeaking. Perspiration streamed from him, and his eyes were round with a kind of piteousness. But he made no answer.

"How about it? Supposing we take the quarrel first?"

"Dr. Laneham, don't h'ask me, for I can't tell you!"

"Very well. Maybe we can get at it through the voice. You know, Jimmy, we too heard a voice. And you told us, before, that you did not hear it."

"An' I didn't! I didn't! You were speaking of some fearful voice that you and Judge Bishop and Mr. Willings 'ere 'eard when you broke in after the murder. That I never 'eard. On the day of the murder I 'eard no voice of any kind!"

And here Willings entered the cross-examination.

"Jimmy," he said, "supposing for the time we leave the voice. There's still that third thing—the *scritto*—the writing. We all want to keep our belief in you. Are you going to keep silent about that, too?"

"No, Mr. Willings!"—it burst out of him. "Not when you put it so, I won't. And that *scritto*—you'll know anyways why I didn't speak of it before. For, gentlemen, that writing—that writing was Mrs. Fisher's will, that's what it was!"

"A will?"

"That's what it was, sir. The vixen Maddalina, she didn't know,—she 'adn't the learning to,—but I knowed. And Mrs. Fisher had written it out 'erself that morning!"

"Jimmy! But why—knowing, knowing

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